WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for desensitizing a crystal having nonlinear optical properties, in particular a lithium niobate or a lithium tantalate crystal, to the damaging effects of intense exposure to light ("optical damage"), the damage being caused by light-induced variations in the refractive indices,
wherein the dark conductivity of the crystal is enhanced by doping with extrinsic ions.

2. The method as recited in Claim 1,
wherein the crystal is doped with protons which increase the protonic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than 3×10^{24} m^{-3}, in particular of more than 4×10^{24} m^{-3} being achieved.

3. The method as recited in Claim 1 or 2,
wherein the crystal is doped with deuterons which increase the deuteronic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than 1×10^{24} m^{-3} being achieved.

4. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims,
wherein the crystal is doped with ions which increase the electronic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than 2×10^{24} m^{-3} being achieved.

5. The method as recited in Claim 4,
wherein the ions are iron ions, whose concentration reaches more than 1×10^{25} m^{-3}.

6. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims,
wherein the ion concentration is increased by heating the crystal in an ion-rich atmosphere.

7. The method as recited in Claim 6, wherein the heating process is carried out under high pressure, in particular of over 100 bar.

8. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims, wherein, during the doping process, an electrical field is applied to the crystal.

9. A crystal, which is desensitized by increasing its dark conductivity by applying the method as recited in one of the preceding claims.

10. An optical component having a crystal as recited in Claim 9.